ReEXPOsitioning the Screen
The Past of the Future
at Montréal’s World’s Fair

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Expo 67: “A Many-Screened Splendor”

Umberto Eco hailed Montréal’s Expo 67 as “that unsurpassed, quintessential, classic World’s Fair” (1986, p. 291). Time magazine christened it “the greatest international exposition ever” (May 5, 1967). Equally, the New York Times proclaimed it “one of the great international shows of the century […] The sophisticated standard of excellence [that] almost defies description” (cited in Berton, 1997). It was the “coming-of-age party no one will forget,” “a fountain of new ideas,” “Canada’s defining moment in the imagination of the futuristic sixties” (CBC, 2004). For the duration of the fair, Montréal became the “hippest, coolest and swingingest place on the planet” (Ogilvy, 1997). And as Hugh Hood at the time giddily remarked, “It’s too much, baby; it’s something else, total environment, romantic synesthesia, the way things are.” In his turn, the communications scholar Donald Theall decreed it a “unique art form” approximating a “multi-sensory total-environment poem” (April, 1967). Dubbed “Canada’s Camelot” (MacDonald, 1967) and the “Last Great World’s Fair” (Ogilvy, 1997), it betrayed a utopian faith in the future and the endless potential of technology not unlike the predictions of the quartet of ex-Slade school Londoners known as the
Prolifération des écrans / Proliferation of Screens


Built to mark Canada’s centennial year, Expo 67 drew a record-breaking 50 million visitors\(^1\) between April 28 and October 27 to the most spacious, costliest and visited exposition on record until that time. Seventy nations participated, sixty-three national pavilions were erected, two islands built, and a self-contained world consisting of 847 buildings, 27 bridges, 51 miles of roadway and walkway, 23 miles of sewers and drains, 70 clocks, 12 clock towers, 40 telephone answering units, 12 information booths, 3 post offices, 4 emergency clinics, 280 guides, 336 public telephones, 6 radio studios, 4 mobile radio units, 386 vending machines, 13 restaurants, 38 snack bars, 285 boutiques, 4330 trash cans and parking for over 24,000 cars materialized before an awestruck public.\(^2\) Classed a category “A” Universal Exposition by the International Bureau of Expositions, Expo 67 was the third within this category type and the first to be staged in North America.

By definition and design, expositions comprise venues for displaying works of art, science, or industry organized to stimulate public interest, promote manufactured products, expand trade, or to illustrate progress in a variety of areas. Essentially trade shows, selling new styles and building new taste markets, expositions function as inventories, organized collections of goods, spaces wherein, for a brief historical moment – as was said of the 1851 Crystal Palace – “meanings appear to prevail [and] the utopian-alchemistic transmutation of all things in the form of capitalist transformation [is realized].” While on the one hand pioneering a new industrial epistemology for public culture (Klein, p. 195), world fairs also reflected their times by introducing new products to the world, pushing the envelope of architectural design, and serving as unparalleled showcases for the world’s top artists and performers. With the 1915 San Francisco Panama-California Exposition though, film took its “place as an exhibition adjunct to a degree never seen before,” noted journalist Ben Macomber (quoted in Rydell, 1985, p. 231). That is, until Expo 67.

Not only the highlight of Canada’s centennial celebrations or perhaps because of them, what set Expo 67 apart from other fairs was not a central symbol comparable to Paris’s Eiffel Tower, London’s Crystal Palace, or New York’s Perisphere, but its claim to being the largest forum to that date for large-scale and specialized media theaters. According to the General Report on Expo

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1. This figure was astounding and led to considerable operational turmoil given that organizers had originally anticipated at most 30 million visitors.

67, “never in history had a festival displayed such a complete spectrum of the performing arts as was presented in Montréal as an integral part of Expo 67” (1967, p. 2291). Besides the opera, ballet, symphony, chamber music, recitals, and folk dance presented in four theatres by participating nations in Expo’s World Festival of entertainment and the World Poetry Meeting which took place in September with 34 eminent poets from 16 nations participating, including Earle Birney, Irving Layton, Robert Creeley, Robert Lowell, and Czeslaw Milosz, three prominent film events were integrated into the Festival: the Eighth International Film Festival, the Fifth Canadian Motion Picture Festival, and the World Retrospective of Animated Film. With more than 3,000 films screened across the Festivals and in nearly every exhibit, this medium in all its manifestations dominated the Fair. Based on the amount of film footage alone, it was estimated then that “a cinema addict could spend every minute of Expo’s 183 days at a screen and still not see every frame available” (Modern Living, May 5, 1967). For Pierre Berton, film was, not surprisingly, Expo’s “crowning glory.” For Calvin Tomkins, the “new techniques in film and film projection had been the big thing at Expo 67.” Writing a review that summer for Arts/Canada, Wendy Michener declared Expo to be a “many-screened splendor” where there was “no avoiding the great visual onslaught” of film, especially experimental film. So extensive was the presence of film at Expo that Michener felt compelled to remark that it “might as well have been an experimental film festival as a world’s fair.” Echoing Michener, Berton (1997) recalled it years later as being a “gigantic film festival of the avant-garde [that] ran night and day.” But beyond that, the films screened at the Fair were heralded as bearing “little or no relation to anything that had gone on before.” In fact, so successful were the experiments in film perceived to be that not soon afterward the artists and designers of the multi-media Pepsi-Cola Pavilion at the Osaka ’70 Exposition contended that this “in itself more or less guaranteed that they [multi-screens] would no longer seem contemporary in 1970” (Tomkins, p. 107).

While Expo 67 has been retrospectively characterized as a prestigious, significant, prominent, and memorable event in cinematic history, as an event it still requires further explanation. According to Bill Readings, an event can be defined as an occurrence as such [...] That is to say, the event is the fact or case that something happens, after which nothing will ever be the same again. The event disrupts any pre-existing referential frame within which it might be represented or understood. The eventhood of the event is the radical singularity of happening, the “it happens” as distinct from the sense of “what is happening” (Readings, 1991, p. xxxi).
Following from this definition, an event can be seen as that which paradoxically stands outside what is happening at the moment of its enunciation, for, strictly speaking, it is that which will come to be. That is, it is a be-coming that will be defined later. At the time of the event, it is not always certain “what is happening” over and above the fact that something “is happening.” Given this, the question this paper addresses concerns not the eventual changes or disruptions since realized by Expo 67 but the “radical singularity” or eventhood of the event that was the fair that can only now from this distance be understood and explained by tracing the web of relations and forces in which it was then situated.

Before Expo: Going beyond the Apparatus

In the face of the veritable explosion of innovative, high-quality screen-based entertainments and experiences at Expo 67, it was almost immediately and with unbridled optimism proclaimed that “Expo will change film-making more than any other event in history” (Grame Ferguson, cited in Berton, 1997, p. 286), that movies “may never be the same again” (Fulford, 1968) and that “no one who makes movies and wants to make better ones will be the same,” according to Newsweek critic and Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Joseph Morgenstern, “once he has seen the sights and smiling audiences at Expo” (Berton, ibid.). Accepting that it was the “biggest event in the history of Canadian movies,” was it, as Fulford furthermore suggested, “more than that”? Had nobody in the “history of the world,” if Fulford is to be believed, “ever done anything like this before”. To quote Theall once more, even if there was “no doubt that the experiments will speed up the film revolution already under way,” the question still remains as to what exactly defined the character of this revolution that yielded such expressions of wonder and amazement. An effective answer to this question requires positioning Expo 67 within the intertextual and intermedial networks of ideas, atmospheres of influence, and chains of personal relationships that shaped cinema at the fair.

For, as Michener (1967) noted at the time, split-screen and multi-image filmmaking had already invaded and been somewhat of a staple of the world of avant-garde films. Citing among other works Andy Warhol’s Chelsea Girls and the more mainstream film Grand Prix as examples, she observed that the movies were “not the same already.” As the historical records show, from the Chicago Exposition of 1893 to the Paris Exposition of 1900, the Brussel’s World’s Fair of 1958 to the Seattle World’s Fair of 1962, the New York World’s Fair of 1964 and Expo 67, film-goers have been treated to a succession of experiments in multi- and large-screen motion picture formats. Shortly after Edison introduced his Kinetoscope to the public at the World’s Columbian
Exposition at Chicago in 1893 and Jenkins and Armat unveiled the prototype of the Vitascope projector at the Cotton Sales Exposition in Atlanta in 1895, Louis Lumière, then head of its film section, devised a large-screen projection system which was featured at the Paris Exposition of 1900. Installed in the Galerie des Machines, Lumière’s giant-screen cinema consisted of fifteen “vues cinématographiques” of Paris and Brussels projected to an audience numbering 3,000 to 5,000 per show, who watched the “vues” from both sides of a 400-square-meter 21 × 16-meter screen made translucent by soaking in water between shows. At the same fair, Raoul Gremoin-Sanson’s Cineorama enthralled audiences by reproducing within an immersive environment the experience of a balloon trip. Created using ten cameras filming during a real ascent, then projecting the results from ten projectors mounted centrally on to a vast 330-foot circumference wrap-around polygonal screen, audiences were treated to a simulated balloon flight while watching from a mocked-up balloon basket located in the middle of the space.

To fully appreciate the filmic experience at the close of the nineteenth-century though, it must be acknowledged that, prior to 1907, that is, prior to the onset of narrative cinema, ordinary film-goers did not go to watch a particular film but rather to catch a glimpse of the image-producing apparatuses themselves. In fact, shows were billed after the names of the apparatus used, such as the biograph, the kinetoscope, the nickelodeon, or the cinematograph. Thus, as Christie has pointed out, the cinema was a “place and an experience long before identifiable works and their makers emerged to claim their niche in history” (1994, p. 8). Indeed, a fascination with the apparatus underlay the first moments of the history of the cinema, for it was the technology which provided immediate interest. According to Heath (1980), what was promoted and sold was the experience of the machine, the apparatus. Re-embedded in this historical and cultural chronicle, Expo 67 reveals its roots. Considered from this perspective and even more so in light of its prominent, however unconscious, endorsement of an aesthetics of demonstration and display, Expo 67 could be seen to be working against the grain of conventional histories that see film moving from “primitive babbling toward full dramatic articulation” (Testa, 1992). What however distinguished Expo 67 from its predecessors, where the focus lingered on the “newness” of new technologies and their capacity to dazzle the visitor, was a turn away from the apparatus to the experience itself.

**A multi-sensory total environment polyphony**

Expo 67 will not go down in history as the expression of a “style”; it is mainly an experience, and frequently a valid experience.

From its architecturally human scale to its meticulously designed signage, Expo 67 was not only a totally planned new environment that, according to the dictates of its Master Plan, favoured both integration while allowing for individual expression, but an experiential one that fostered a polyattentive mode of interaction within a thematic framework.

In adopting the theme of “Man and his World” (“Terre des Hommes”) at the Montebello Conference in 1963, a philosophical concept borrowed from the writer Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, the Department of Installations built on the humanistic goals of the 1958 Brussels fair, their goal being to create an environment emphasizing human scale. In taking into account location, spatial and temporal relationships, circulation volumes, and visual design, the Master Plan both defined an object of vision and consequently engineered a field of vision for visitors taking their “very first steps on the ‘invented isles’,” leaving them with the feeling of having been “transposed to a new world” (vol. III, p. 1268). The Plan called for the establishment of a theoretical network of routes by which the visitor “could follow the development of a thematic idea along a horizontal circuit, whilst he could identify the National participations in different sectors along vertical circuits” (Report, p. 1269). The horizontal/vertical orientations were counterbalanced by pavilions that were technologically daring, creative and playful, what Time magazine described as a “mirage-like assortment of architectural marvels” (1967). Indeed, as Robert Fulford was led to remark, “at Expo the walls slanted. Doors and windows were, quite often, not rectangular. Floors frequently weren’t horizontal. The right angle and the straight line no longer ruled the world – there were hexagons, pentagons and truncated tetrahedrons” (1968, p. 35). A cursory glance at images of the displays and screen formats housed within the various pavilions also reveals a similar asymmetrically-balanced shaping and organization of space, with visitors being confronted with an overabundance of giant rectangular screens, cylindrical or wraparound screens, split-screens, and dome screens, with enhanced-format systems such as Circle-Vision, Multi-image, Variable Picture, Polyvision, Diapolyecran and Kino-automat. On further inspection, three types of screen-based spectatorial conditions can be discerned, namely, immersive, tessellated, and distributed and dedifferentiated. By turns, immersive cinematic experiences sealed off observers from external visual impressions, tessellated screen environments presented a mosaic of interlocking frontally-viewed images, and distributed and dedifferentiated displays stretched images and text across screens spatially arrayed within walk-through environments.

3. “To be a man is to feel that by carrying one stone you can contribute to the building of the world.” Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, Terre des homes, Paris, Gallimard, 1991, c1939.
Fair-goers were immersed in Pavilion displays literally raining with images, with most promising an “exciting sense of involvement.” Among the theme pavilions, the Pavilion of Man and His Health contained a unique theatre-in-the-round composed of six stages serially combined with three overhead screens, the Man and the Polar Regions theme pavilion had its Carousel Theatre on which was screened an “exciting 18-minute film visit to the Polar regions,” and in the Resources for Man pavilion visitors took in a multi-screen audio-visual presentation that explained modern energy conservation processes. National pavilions such as Canada’s incorporated a revolving theater, while the U.S. Pavilion housed within its geodesic dome a 300-seat, 3-screen feature film depicting children’s games. Corporate pavilions such as Canadian Pacific, Canadian National, and Bell Telephone did likewise.

An immersive experience that attracted 30,000 visitors per day, the Bell Telephone Pavilion on the surface sought to tell the story of Canada and Communications within the context of Man and His World by means of the “most ambitious show of present and future communications ever staged by Canada’s telephone Industry.” However, its real story – and principal appeal – lay not so much in its featured attraction, an exercise in nation-building from Walt Disney entitled “Canada 67” that included a voyage on the schooner Bluenose, a flight over the Rockies, the Stampede in Calgary, a hockey game between the Toronto Maple Leafs and the Montréal Canadiens, and the Winter Carnival in Québec City, but in the mode of exhibition itself. Using a process developed by the Disney corporation called Circle-Vision 360° the film was projected on a wraparound screen housed in a cylindrical theatre to an audience standing in the centre. The effect was one of near-total immersion in the image, of “being there’ at outstanding events and scenes throughout Canada” (Official Guide). The result of a collaboration between eight Canadian companies seeking to improve upon the earlier Circarama format, Circle-Vision 360° required nine cameras and nine projectors for achieving its panoramic imagery. During the filming phase it utilized a camera pod on which were mounted all nine cameras pointing up into mirrors so that each camera shared the same virtual nodal point. To project a seamless image, the projectors were hidden in the vertical mullions between adjacent screens, projecting on the screen opposite. With its concealed apparatus, the ensuing experience gave the illusion of what can best be described as unmediated referentiality.

As an example of a tessellated screen environment, the Canadian Pacific-Cominco Pavilion consisted of two pavilions, the first of which included a 12-sided 600-seat theater with six screens covering a total area of 2,952 square

4. Descriptions of the Pavilions summarize those found in the Official Guide to Expo 67.
feet – seven times the size of an average theater screen and almost twice the size of a Cinerama screen, the second of which contained five main rooms plus one, each devoted to a different sense. A 35mm 22-minute film directed by Alexander Hammid and Francis Thompson entitled *We Are Young!* was projected twenty-four times a day onto a tessellated cluster of six screens, three lower and three upper, using six synchronized Zeiss-Icon water-cooled projectors (Shantoff, 1967, p. 4). Originally inspired by Abel Gance’s 1927 multi-screen classic *Napoléon*, Thompson and Hammid adopted the three-screen format for their Academy Award-winning* To Be Alive* created especially for the Johnson Wax Pavilion at the 1964 New York World’s Fair. A cinematic hit, it was seen by an estimated ninety percent of fair-goers. While not as critically lauded for its subject matter as their earlier effort, *We Are Young!* was nonetheless singled out as being one of the “more interesting explorations of multi-screen,” especially for the “dazzling optical shocks” that conveyed “speed, exuberance [and] vitality” (Shatnoff, 1967, p. 4) on a scale never before seen.

Two of the most ambitious non-filmic tessellated screen projects were found at the Czechoslovakian pavilion. The first of these, the 9½-minute presentation entitled *Polyvision: Czechoslovakia – The Automated Country*, was developed by Czech set-designer and inventor Josef Svoboda and used twenty-eight slide projectors, ten motion-picture screens, five mobile projection screens, and a 10-track computer tape for programming to depict Czech industrial life. An example according to *Time* magazine of “cubist eyes,” the work accomplished this by “discard[ing] the screen, project[ing] its images against a score of whirling spools, globes and spheroids” (“Magic in Montreal,” July 7, 1967). The second of these, Emil Radok’s *Diapolyecran*, had viewers sitting on a carpeted floor facing a wall of 112 separate cubes upon which images were projected singly, in groups, or all at once from behind. 5,300,000 bits of information memorized on tape and 19,600 impulses emitted per second were required to program this 14½-minute show incorporating 15,000 images.

Other films, such as Christopher Chapman’s Oscar-winning documentary portrait of life in Ontario, *A Place to Stand*, projected a collage of tessellated inset images onto a single oblong 66 × 30-foot screen – like a “Mondrian painting [that] then shatters […] into indeterminate shapes that sometimes cooperate, sometimes compete with each other” (*Time*, July 7, 1967). A focal point of the Ontario Pavilion, this work compressed an hour and a half of footage out of 40 miles of film shot into 18 minutes of screen-running time.

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5. *To Be Alive* won the 1965 Award for Best Documentary Short Subject. It was also screened at the United Nations Pavilion at Expo 67.
Strictly speaking not a multi-screen, but a multi-image, presentation, *A Place to Stand* served as an inspiring model for subsequent films using complex inset screens, such as Norman Jewison’s *The Thomas Crown Affair*.\(^6\)

Unlike Chapman’s film but not unlike experimental works such as Svoboda’s *Polyvision* and Radok’s *Diopolycran*, distributed and dedifferentiated screen environments move beyond the frontal orientation of these tessellated works in order to explore the possibilities of a nonfoveal, distracted, and peripheral visual scanning of both still and moving images. As such, to import a musical metaphor, they call forth a scattered polyphonic mode of attention that is horizontal in nature. The normally favoured stress placed on melody and the vertical solidity of harmonious chords is loosened and focus is dispersed across a network of polyphonic strands. In making the connection between painting and music, Paul Klee refers in his pedagogic writings to the polyphonic character of the entire picture plane. Defining polyphony as “the simultaneity of several independent themes,” lines are “allowed to echo one another, repeat one another above or below – converging almost to the point of touching at certain points and moving away at other points […] A kind of free-rhythm configuration with areas of inward and outward pressure” (tr. 1961).

Inspired in general by Klee’s work and, in particular, his 1930 watercolor *Polyphonic Architecture*, the noted American architect, urban planner, educator, and author and Executive Director of the Philadelphia Planning Commission from 1949 to 1970, Edmund Bacon, suggested in his still considerably influential contemporary work on urban design, *Design of Cities*, published in 1967, that this watercolor provides a meaningful vocabulary for planners concerned with the potentialities of defining a polyphonic space. For Bacon, Klee’s watercolor vividly demonstrates the interrelation between planning and architecture with the grey rectangles representing the “usual planning procedures” and the “architectural rhythms, occupying only a small part of the area, set[ting] up a harmony which reverberates through all the spaces, showing that it is not necessary to design in detail every square foot of an area to achieve a great and unified work” (1967, p. 319). A student at the *Cranbrook Academy of Art* of Eliel Saarinen, the renowned Finnish architect famous for his restrained, stripped-down classicism fused with Arts and Crafts ideals, Bacon adapted his teacher’s organic modernist style to urban planning in an effort to generate a “more spatial conception of the object” that was both closed and open in form, focused and indeterminate, yet “interwoven into a total fabric” (*ibid.*, p. 322).

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\(^6\) Jewison had taken his cinematographer Haskell Wexler and editor Hal Ashby to Expo 67 to see Chapman’s film. As he recounts, “We were trying to tell five stories. We used the multiple screen as a story-telling device […] long before digital effects and computerized technology” (Film voiceover, MGM DVD, 1999).
With encouragement from Saarinen, two of his other students, Charles and Ray Eames, perhaps the most famous partnership in twentieth-century American design, sought to apply his principles to not only furniture and architecture but film and exhibition design as well. As part of a cultural exchange, the Eameses were commissioned by the U.S. Department of State in 1959 to prepare a multi-screen film presentation to be held in Moscow that depicted a “day in the life of the United States”. Produced towards the end of the 1950s, when the temptation to break free of the conventional single-frame screen format was particularly desirable, even an economic necessity, in response to the encroachments of television, this “totally new type of presentation” (Eames/Kirkham, 1983) consisting of seven 32-foot screens enclosed in a geodesic dome designed by Buckminster Fuller was followed soon afterwards by a second U.S. government commissioned multi-media presentation for the 1962 Seattle World’s Fair entitled The House of Science. Think, their most elaborate work, was produced in collaboration with Saarinen’s son, Eero, for the IBM pavilion at the 1964 New York World’s Fair. A fifteen-minute show screened in a large ellipsoidal-shaped theater housed in a pavilion shaped and styled like the typing ball in the new IBM Selectric typewriter, it was a visual spectacular that utilized 22 tessellated and variously angled screens, fourteen large and eight small, upon which were projected still and moving images by means of 14 synchronized projectors. 500 spectators per show watched from a twelve-tier “People Wall” resembling a set of bleachers that hydraulically hoisted them sixty feet into the theater prior to the screening. Called a “thinking man’s pavilion” by Esquire magazine, the Eameses’ film ostensibly sought to explain cognitive problem-solving processes but, according to Caplan, most visitors left having read it “as an attempt to explain how computers worked” (1990, p. 66).

Think drew directly on the work of Austrian-born artist and designer Herbert Bayer. Trained at the Bauhaus where he studied with Kandinsky and Klee, Bayer practiced its principles for more than six decades, first in Europe and then in U.S., where he played a seminal role as designer and educator at the Aspen Institute for Humanistic Studies. With a firmly held belief in the notion of the “total artist,” Bayer never limited himself to one medium and worked across traditional disciplinary lines with a studio and commercial practice that included painting and sculpture, architecture and environmental art, typography, photography, printmaking, product and exhibition design. Bayer’s first project upon his arrival in New York in 1938 was to organize, design and install an exhibition of Bauhaus art for the Museum of Modern Art. Having already designed ten exhibitions between 1928 and 1938 and with a nineteen-year association with the Bauhaus, Bayer was a natural choice for the project. In fact, after leaving the Bauhaus, his foremost interest had been in exhibition design. Within a few short years, he had mounted “Road to Victory”
in 1942 and “Airways to Peace” in 1943, in the process introducing the North American public to advanced principles of exhibition design. For a public used to exhibition spaces consisting of static white cubes to which were attached flat images, Bayer’s innovative display practices, which emphasized the hall as a **total environment** and incorporated elevated ramps, angled images, peepholes, movable exhibits, panoramic views, and photomontages, while the norm in exhibition practice today, proved to be extremely radical and revolutionary then.

By the 1940s, Bayer had become well known as a master exhibition designer. In his important review of international exhibition design, the designer and architect George Nelson makes the claim that, by the early 1950s, “perhaps more than any other designer [Bayer] has developed, synthesized and expounded new ways of visual communication” (1953, p. 108). For Bayer, exhibition design constituted a new medium, one that required a radical rethinking of the relationship between exhibition spaces, exhibits, and visitors – between situation, object, and viewer. To that end,

Exhibition design has evolved as a new discipline, as an apex of all media and powers of communication and of collective efforts and effects. The combined means of visual communication constitutes a remarkable complexity: language as visible printing or as sound, pictures as symbols, paintings, and photographs, sculptural media, materials and surfaces, color, light, movement (of the display as well as the visitor), films, diagrams, and charts. The total application of all plastic and psychological means (more than anything else) makes exhibition design an intensified and new language (Bayer, 1961).

The new syntax for exhibition design proposed by Bayer was supported by a principle he had diagrammed while collaborating, first, with Walter Gropius, Marcel Breuer, and Laszlo Moholy-Nagy on an exhibition in 1930 and then with Gropius and Breuer on a second exhibition in 1931, resulting in an extended diagram in 1935. Challenging the traditional practice of placing pictures at a predetermined hanging height, the two conceptual diagrams hint at new possibilities for extending the viewer’s **field of vision** by allowing for the placement of objects in a 360-degree three-dimensional space. According to Alexander Dorner, the museum director and curator who organized his first retrospective in 1947, Bayer’s reconceptualization of exhibition space

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7. In 1953, Nelson collaborated with Charles Eames in developing what many consider to be the first multi-media presentation in an educational context in the U.S., “A Rough Sketch for a Sample Lesson for a Hypothetical Course.” Striving to replace the conventional lecture format with new teaching techniques, Nelson and Eames’s project combined slide images, a narrator, printed visual information, sound, and even smells. With its emphasis on links and connections, this project can be seen as anticipating hypermedia.
furthermore dissolved the “traditional three-dimensional ‘room’ by creating new relations with divisions, penetrations and interactions” (1947, p. 201). Consequently, exhibitions were not limited to “absolute space and its logic but the energies of the contents of the exhibition and their interaction” (ibid., p. 202). Describing Bayer’s 1942 exhibition of photographs, “The Road to Victory,” Dorner portrayed it as “one gigantic photomontage rising up in the spectator’s mind as he walked along. The pictures and the ideas and activities they represented interpenetrated in the minds of the visitors, interacting and creating associations and spontaneous reactions” (ibid., p. 207). No longer read from a frontal view as a linear narration with explanatory texts, the exhibition, now a dynamic, participatory, polyphonic environment rather than a neutrum, or blank, neutral space, had become the text itself.

With his shift to large-scale environmental design and architecture, Bayer’s exhibition design activity effectively ceased after 1960. As for the Eameses, they picked up where Bayer left off, their projects underwritten by larger exhibition budgets. But they too shied away from multi-screen presentations after producing Think in order to concentrate on work in other media. Indeed, when asked about the multi-media shows at Expo 67, Ray Eames thought them to be “rather frivolous” (Schrader, 1970, p. 7). Yet, without doubt, their work played a key formative role for the multi-screen productions displayed at Expo 67 such as, for instance, Hammid and Thompson’s film We Are Young! On the other hand, their impact on distributed and dedifferentiated cinematic presentations was rather limited. Multi-media displays like those found in the Man and Life Pavilion, with its adjoining screens and oversize models of the human brain, and the Labyrinth, with its vertically and horizontally juxtaposed screens, were clearly more indebted to Bayer’s conception of an extended, all-embracing field of vision. However, while the latter two can be categorized as exemplary distributed cinematic environments, they cannot equally be considered dedifferentiated. The distinction is important. In the case of the Labyrinth, the direct forerunner to IMAX, a Toronto-based international corporation founded at Expo 67 that has since been producing camera and projection systems for large screen formats that create visually immersive cinematic environments capable of blurring the difference between image and perceptual reality, the viewer’s experience, even though split

8. Bayer was licensed to practice architecture in Colorado on April 1, 1960.
9. IMAX was founded by Graeme Ferguson, Roman Kroiter, Robert Kerr and William C. Shaw.
10. According to promotional material, “IMAX films bring distant, exciting worlds within your grasp […] It’s the next best thing to being there.”
between two screens, is differentiated, that is, subject to focused attention. In contrast, the Man and Life Pavilion was so organized as to disperse and scatter attention horizontally, that is, to de-differentiate it across an array of screens and objects. At this Pavilion, Fulford observed, “you were told nothing; shown everything” (1968, p. 159). Compared with the Labyrinth, it was structured polyphonically.

In his seminal work on the psychology of artistic imagination, The Hidden Order of Art, published posthumously in 1967, Anton Ehrenzweig devotes a chapter to these two modes of attention. According to him, differentiation enforces upon the viewer or listener a particular gestalt or figure that removes it from its ground, dedifferentiation on the other hand frees one, through a process of low-level scanning, from having to make a choice. One mode of attention is vertical and disjunctive, the other horizontal and conjunctive. By definition then, polyphonic environments are characterized by the latter two features. What to Ray Eames appeared “frivolous” were in fact spaces not intended for the sole purpose of transmitting information, the goal of most of the Eameses’s multi-media presentations, but experiential texts subject to a range of interpretations within a thematic framework.

The Nonmatrix Uploaded: Polyattending the Movies

Now I have other plans – for the rest of the year and also for June. In that month there’ll be the annual banquet of the New York Mycological Society with Joe Hyde cooking on the beach… Also I’ll go to Montreal to see the Fuller dome and Jasper Johns’ Map of the World According to Buckminster Fuller which is to be in it.

John Cage, A Year from Monday (1967)

Where do we go from here? Towards theatre.

John Cage, Silence (1961)

If, over the course of its delirious six-month run, Expo 67 endeavored to re-envision exhibition design through the introduction of polyphonic structures, it also sought to radicalize the conditions of cinematic spectatorship beyond the register of avant-garde and institutionalized art practices and within this

11. According to Kroitor, Ferguson recommended to his collaborators that, given the technical complexity and challenges of the system they had designed, they “ought to be looking for a way to make these films without multiple projectors” (see Birth of IMAX).

12. For the Eameses, all information presented had to pertain directly to the fundamental idea with all else being superfluous. The experience of watching one of their multi-screen presentations, while providing more information than normally can be processed, should not allow for random play.
fairground setting. Of the roster of influences and antecedents assembled to explain the motivation behind and subsequent formal breakthroughs in viewing experiences, scant reference is made to the important role played by the ideas of the composer John Cage. Cage was an internationally acclaimed composer, essayist, poet, visual artist and teacher and without doubt one of the most important and influential figures in twentieth-century avant-garde music. Known for his compositions for percussion ensemble, piano, prepared piano, tape and live electronic music and his ideas about silence, indeterminacy, and non-intention, his impact has been felt not only in the world of music but in dance, painting, video art, poetry, performance art and theatre. Concerning the latter, the critic and foremost chronicler of performance art Michael Kirby considered Cage's work to be the “backbone of the new theatre” (1969, p. 77), while theatre director Richard Schechner sees Cage as one of the two most important influences on theatre since World War II (1973, p. 60). From Allan Kaprow to Nam June Paik to Laurie Anderson and Robert Wilson, his effect on them and many others has been inestimable and widely recognized. In his search to “find a radical way to work – to get at the real, at the root of the matter” (Retallack, 1996), Cage himself acknowledged the influence of, to cite just a few seminal figures, Antonin Artaud, Buckminster Fuller, and Marshall McLuhan, who led him to broaden his artistic vision in a multi-faceted way. Over the course of 50s and 60s, two of the most important decades of his career that were marked by a period of intense compositional activity, Cage moved away from music to theatre, from concert hall to the world at large after having found an affinity with and confirmation of his views in their aesthetic and conceptual frameworks.

By 1967, he had become less and less interested in composition in order to pursue more social concerns. As he rationalized this move in the foreword to his second collection of fugitive pieces published in that year, A Year from Monday, “the reason I am less and less interested in music is not only that I find environmental sounds and noises more useful aesthetically than the sounds produced by the world's musical cultures, but that, when you get right down to it, a composer is simply someone who tells other people what to do. I find this an unattractive way of getting things done. I'd like our activities to be more social and anarchically so” (1967, p. ix). Underlying this new approach to music was the belief that “art instead of being an object made by one person is a process set in motion by a group of people. Art's socialized. It isn't someone saying something, but people doing things, giving everyone (including those involved) the opportunity to have experiences they would not otherwise have had” (1967, p. 151). Coupled to this shift in compositional strategy was a mode of attention already found in earlier works such as, for example, Variations V (1965) and defined by Cage as involving the simultaneous apprehension of two or more unrelated phenomena or polyattentiveness (Copeland,
In an ongoing effort to erase the gap between art and life, Cage proposed this mode of attention as a discipline to be practiced daily. “I think,” in response to a question about whether or not his name was in the telephone book, “that one of our most accessible disciplines now is paying attention to more than one thing at a time. If we can do that with equanimity, then I propose paying attention to three things at the same time. You can practice it as a discipline; I think it is more effective than sitting cross-legged” (Kostelanetz, 2003, p. 20).

But the disciplinary shift signaled in 1967 was more than just perceptual, it was situational. While the works Cage composed prior to then were essentially philosophical projections of an idea made explicit in his notorious silent piece of 1952, 4’33”, where the notation-absent work provided a time-space canvas to be filled by the actions of the performer and any chance sounds generated by the environment, the works that followed eliminated the theatrical proscenium that served to separate performer from audience altogether in favour of an organizing principle modeled after the circus. For Cage, the word circus by definition meant that each being was at the centre of the universe, and thus creation consisted of a multiplicity of centres (Kostelanetz, 2003, p. 248). This shift in perspective forced Cage to remove himself as a focal point of his performances, placing instead each performer and each audience member at the centre.

In a year that saw Cage take his place as composer-in-residence at the University of Cincinnati; participate in January in the “Contemporary Voices in the Arts: An Illustrated Discussion” series sponsored by the New York State Council on the Arts with the main event being a “TV Dinner/Homage to E.A.T./Food for Thought” set on the stage of the 92nd Street YM-YWHA in New York City; compose and perform in February his Music for Carillon #5 for 47 bells for which the grain structure of various pieces of plywood determined notational parameters; organize in the spring the Newport Mix whose basic idea required invited diners to a yacht anchored in the Ohio River to bring tape loops to be played and circulated; collaborate in June on Music for Museum Event #5 where “people followed dancers into different rooms of the museum [while] others gathered around me on the terrace”; and in August participate in the first of a number of performances called “Dialogues” at the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture in Skowhegan, Maine, where, accompanied by an array of tape recorders, amplifiers and a grand piano, Cage read from his text “Diary: How to Improve the World (You Will Only Make Matters Worse),” 1967 drew to a close with the invention of an event form Cage designated a musicircus. While the new genre in fact begins within the series of eight Variations composed between 1958 and 1967, it found its first fully distinctive and carnivalesque expression as a multi-media event of simultaneous and independent performances involving large numbers of participants in
often non-traditional performance spaces in November of 1967 at the Stock Pavilion in Urbana-Champaign at the University of Illinois. A densely packed exercise in simultaneity, this urban genre included jazz bands, pianists, dancers, mimes, vocalists, films, slides, black lights, balloons, cider and popcorn. Under-scored by Cage’s embrace of Henry David Thoreau’s notions of anarchy, the individual, and society to which he had been introduced to earlier that year by his friend Wendell Berry and, as he told readers of Focus magazine in the November issue, he was “currently reading the complete works” (Revill, 1992, p, 220), the Musicircus was the culmination of Cage’s use of unrelated simultaneities in a multi-media presentation form that was increasingly non-intentional and multiply-focused and heralded a new urban genre that was “crowded, noisy, and insubordinate” (Perloff and Junkerman, 1994). Posters promoting the event had as their tag line, “You won’t hear a thing. You’ll hear everything” (Husarik, 1983, p. 5). As Cage said of the event, his hope was to “involve the public in this. I want the performers to be the public” (ibid., p. 4).

The performance had taken place in Illinois as a result of Cage relocating to the University upon Lejaren Hiller’s request that he take up a residency as an Associate Member of the Center for Advanced Studies so as to collaborate with him on a multi-media composition entitled HPSCHD. Staged as an architectural analogue of the planetary system in the university’s 16,000-seat Assembly Hall and using an I Ching-inspired computer program capable of generating hundreds of chance outcomes, HPSCHD in its final form included seven pre-amplifiers, seven amplified harpsichords, 208 computer-generated tapes, fifty-two projectors, sixty-four slide projectors, eight movie projectors, 6,400 slides, forty movies, a 340-foot circular screen and several eleven-by-forty-foot opaque rectangular polyethylene screens. The computer-written music consisted of twenty-minute solos and was based on Mozart’s Musical Dice Game. Eventually performed in 1969 at Assembly Hall at the University of Illinois, it constituted the most elaborate, large-scale of the musicircus genre.

While the musicircus as a performance genre came to its full realization in 1967, its roots can be traced back beyond the 60s’ Variations pieces to Cage’s “untitled event” of 1952, universally touted as being the prototypical multi-media, multi-disciplinary happening as well as the “activity that was to have the greatest impact on American art” (Harris, 1987, p. 226). In reconstructing the texture of traces stemming from that work a case can be made for Cage’s influence not only on subsequent performance work but on Expo 67 itself. An impromptu event conceived one day after lunch and presented without rehearsal, scripts, or costumes set within a simple structure of random time brackets (see Duberman, 1972; Gena, 1992), it consisted of a joint performance by Merce Cunningham, Robert Rauschenberg, David Tudor, M.C. Richards, and Charles Olson and included film, slides, poetry, music and dance. Its
importance in relation to Expo 67 lies primarily in Cage’s readings and interpretations of Artaud’s *Theater and Its Double*, the work which, alongside Huang Po’s *Doctrine of Universal Mind*, most directly inspired the event that has since been deemed to be the first *Happening*. For it was, according to Cage, Artaud who gave him “the idea that theatre could take place free of a text, that if a text were in it, that it needn’t determine the other actions, that sounds, that activities, and so forth, could all be free rather than tied together” (Kostelanetz, 2003, p. 110). Thus stimulated by Artaud’s theories, Cage went on to develop his ideas of “anarchic dissociation” and “profound anarchy” that, in turn, supplied the conceptual ground for his later concept of *polyattentiveness*.

Upheld since his death in 1948 as a “prophet” who “raised his voice in the [theatrical] desert” by many (Brook, 1968), Artaud was a visionary, iconoclastic and daring actor, director, playwright and essayist whose influence was felt not only in Europe but in North America. An early member of the surrealist movement in Paris and a significant influence on avant-garde European theatre, the cornerstone of his approach to theatre, which was based on transformation and transcendence, was his conviction that it could exist independently of language. Revolting against the “dictatorship of words,” Artaud challenged the view that theatre was just a physical reflection of the script. In its stead he argued that it should be freed from the proscenium arch and be let loose in a large space shared by performers and audience alike. As he states in his second *Theatre of Cruelty* manifesto included in *Theater and Its Double*, “so composed and so constructed, the spectacle will be extended, by elimination of the stage, to the entire hall of the theater and will scale the walls from the ground up on light catwalks, will physically envelop the spectator and immerse him in a constant bath of light, images, movements, and noises […] And just as there will be no unoccupied point in space, there will be neither respite nor vacancy in the spectator’s mind or sensibility. That is, between life and the theater there will be no distinct division, but instead a continuity” (1958, p. 126). These ideas about the theatre resonated with Cage, who had brought back the untranslated essays from Paris to Black Mountain College in 1948. Upon his instigation, the poet, potter, and fellow faculty member Mary Caroline Richards completed the first English translations of the texts which were eventually published a decade later to wide acclaim. Richards’ translation became fashionable reading in New York theatre circles in the early 60s, becoming standard fare for experimental theatre groups such as the Open Theater, the previously mentioned Living Theater, and the Performance Group with Arthur Penn claiming the Richards’ translation was instrumental in changing forever the course of theatre in America. As a performance practice, *Happenings* grew directly out of Artaud’s prescriptions for the theatre. For, according to Susan Sontag, it was Artaud who first identified the three structural features
of the *Happening*: its supra-personal or impersonal treatment of persons, its disregard of the word in favour of spectacle and sound, and its professed aim to assault the audience (1966, p. 274).

Donald Theall, Marshall McLuhan’s first and most important Ph.D. student, secretary for his inaugural Culture and Communication seminar, and close associate from 1950-1954, has also noted Artaud’s anticipation of the theatre as an “inclusive form – a convergence of modes of communication and statement” (2003). Although McLuhan was not familiar with Artaud’s theories (see Peter Schmideg), it has nevertheless been claimed that Artaud’s references to multi-sensory mixed media prefigured McLuhan’s discussions of “cool” media. And, if anything, the phantasmagoria that was Expo 67 was, in McLuhan’s sense of something extending several senses at once and demanding participation, cool. Recounting his mid-60s experiences of being in Montréal as the newly-appointed chair of McGill University’s English Department where he was hired to develop a communication program and, in addition, to direct a detailed research project on the multi-media and environmental exhibits at Expo 67 (2001, p. 231), Theall recalled that McLuhan’s ideas provided a formidable theoretical backdrop for the Canadian theme pavilions at the fair. By then McLuhan had become an internationally celebrated public intellectual. Beginning with the popular success of his book, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, and followed-up by much, often self-directed, media and cultural hype, McLuhan had been turned into “Canada’s intellectual comet” and the “oracle of the electronic age.” Not surprisingly then, he was actively sought out as a consultant by the organizers of Expo 67. Echoing Theall, Arthur Porter has noted McLuhan’s role as a conceptual catalyst for the “Man in the Community” pavilions (Nevitt and McLuhan, 1994, p. 27), while David Mackay, the producer of the celebrated Ontario pavilion film *A Place to Stand*, has revealed that the film’s title was itself extracted from McLuhan’s *Understanding Media*. McLuhan himself was the subject of major media attention when the French translation of his book *The Gutenberg Galaxy* was launched at the Québec Pavilion on 7 July. To be with “le maître à l’Expo was a mediatic obsession” (n.a., 1967). Jacques Languirand, renowned Québécois actor, playwright, and radio personality, and one of the creators of the multimedia exhibits in the “Man in the Community” pavilion has as well acknowledged his indebtedness to McLuhan, whose aphorisms provided guiding quotations for the pavilion. Reflecting on Expo 67 in a public address given to a business audience

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13. At this point in his career, McLuhan was being aggressively marketed by Howard Gossage and Gerald Feigen, two California entrepreneurs who acted as “consultants to people who can’t get what they need from specialists because what they need is the big picture,” and Eugene Schwartz of the Human Development Corporation, who successfully packaged the “McLuhan” brand (Wilmott, 1992, p. 345-346).
at the Hilton Hotel in New York City in September of that year entitled “Open-Mind Surgery,” McLuhan reckoned that “Expo in Montreal has been a success for the simple reason that they pulled the story line off the whole show […] Expo is a mosaic without connections […] Total involvement results […] And Expo is exactly like the TV screen; it’s a mosaic, not a picture […] It’s an involving, mosaic structure in which the story line or connected spaces are not there. The viewer has to supply them; that’s how he gets involved” (2003, p. 154). As argued in the preceding discussion of Cage's *musicircus*, that involvement, that possibility of movement, was *situational*. For, as Cage insisted when organizing the *Musicircus* event in Illinois, “The audience must be in the round because we live in the round […] The audience can change its experience by where it moves; if you don’t like what you’re doing here, you can go there. Or you can leave altogether” (Husarik, 1983, p. 4). Notwithstanding that Expo 67 was at that time openly acknowledged as being “McLuhan’s Fair” (Theall), it was Cage who first mobilized the spectator in his performances and, it could be argued, at the fair, while McLuhan reported on this tectonic shift in spectatorial function. It is here that Cage’s influence can be seen most directly. Founded on his refusal to place limits upon music and Artaud’s ideas, his move towards theatre, it can be argued, supplied the conceptual basis for redefining the role of the fair-goer as a “nonmatrixed performer” (Kirby, 1965). Unlike actors, nonmatrixed performers are not enmeshed within a matrix of “pretended or represented character, situation, place, and time” (*ibid.*, p. 4). Rather, they speak and act for and as themselves. Participants in a work by Cage function in this fashion. So while actors perform within subjective and objective person-place matrices, musicians such as Cage, and by extension fair-goers, relate to no other place than that which physically contains them. However, as Kirby points out, “the context of place […] as determined by the physical setting and the information provided verbally and visually by the production, is frequently so strong that it makes an ‘actor’ out of any person [and] in many cases nothing needs to be done in order to ‘act’” (*ibid*.). In the end, visitors to Expo 67 not only engaged with *polyphonic* structures in a *polyattentive* manner in many instances, but did so as nonmatrixed performers.

**On Not Objecting to Minimalism: On Not Escaping Theatre**

Art degenerates as it approaches the condition of theatre.

Michael Fried, “Art and Objecthood” (1967)

With the spectator’s attention instead turned away from the illusion on the screen to the surrounding space and the physical properties of the moving image, with the dominant experience of a single frontal screen supplanted by a nonmatrixed theatrical performativity, these new conditions of spectatorship
invited participation, movement, and the sharing of multiple viewpoints. Implicitly echoing the theoretical advances made by artists associated with Minimalism, an art movement then in its heyday, the pavilions at Expo engaged viewers in a phenomenological experience of objects within the architectural dimensions of the space itself and not just pictorial space, in the process transforming actual space into a complex and expanded perceptual and performative field. In their work, minimalists such as Robert Morris and Donald Judd achieved a rhetorical and practical displacement of meaning from the interior to the outside of a work of art. By not concealing the artist’s intent or personality from view, the Minimalists asked that “meaning be seen as arising from […] a public rather than a private space” (Krauss, p. 262). By refusing to endow the work of art with an illusionistic centre or interior, the Minimalists, Krauss furthermore argues, re-evaluated “the logic of a particular source of meaning rather than denying meaning to the aesthetic object altogether” (ibid., italics in original text). The radical critique of art’s objecthood that informed Minimalism’s sense of theatricality not only stimulated much subsequent work in installation and performance art but facilitated a critical engagement with the very notion of spectatorship itself. This critical remaking of art as a form of public engagement with an object, as opposed to an act of contemplation of something inherently hidden, that occurred in and around 1967 ushered in an era of afterness, according to Krauss. For her, it was the publication in the Summer 1967 issue of Artforum\textsuperscript{14} of Michael Fried’s putatively seminal article “Art and Objecthood” in particular that signaled the exact moment when a theoretical wedge had been driven into sixties discourse on art. Perhaps one of the most reproduced texts of high modernism, its arguments, Krauss claims, divided the period into a before and an after (Krauss, 1987, p. 60).

In declaring war on what he quixotically called theatricality which, he asserted, denied the viewer a proper aesthetic experience, Fried crystallized the debate around Minimalism. Rejecting the situationalist aesthetic favoured by the Minimalists, Fried, through a reworking of Greenbergian theory, introduced the concept of presence to the analysis of modern art. Attempting to redeem modernist aesthetics, Fried reasoned that an object possesses presence when it demands of the beholder that they simply be aware of it as it presents itself in a non-durational perceptual instant. An exemplary modernist work is therefore one that stands apart from its surroundings and exists autonomously.

\textsuperscript{14} This issue is considered to be the single most famous issue of Artforum. Not only did it contain Fried’s piece, but Sol LeWitt’s “Paragraphs on Conceptual Art,” Robert Morris’s “Notes on Sculpture, Part 3,” and Robert Smithson’s “Towards the Development of an Art Terminal Site.”
its value residing completely within it. A paradigmatically theatrical attention to situation and to the participation of the spectator, on the other hand, only detracts from the essential quality of the work.

Thus, for Fried, the “success, even the survival, of the arts has come increasingly to depend on their ability to defeat theater” (1968). Moreover, Fried argued, by its very nature the one art that escaped theatre entirely and was capable of defeating it was the movies (ibid., p. 140). And it did so by providing an automatic and guaranteed absorbing refuge from theatre, not unlike that, it can be argued, of IMAX cinema. Heralded as a revolution in cinema, this large-screen format seems less so when seen through the optic of Fried’s arguments in “Art and Objecthood.” In addition, when located within longer histories of immersive experiments in the cinema (see Grau), IMAX appears to be a regressive development.

At the heart of this theoretical debate stood the event that was Expo 67, and as Robert Fulford has reminded us, in contrast to Fried’s pronouncements, “Expo cinema forced us to look at its subjects in new ways, to stretch our visual imaginations, to participate, in the film rather than absorbing it” (1967). Given that an event cannot be understood at the time in that its meaning, to invoke Lyotard, is not “tautological with what has happened” and resists representation (1988, p. 79), only now can it be seen that the cinematic revolution that was Expo lay not so much in large-screen or multi-image film formats and experiences, but in its vital attempt to splendidly degenerate into the art of nonmatrixed theater. As John Cage once observed, “Theatre takes place all the time, wherever one is. And art simply facilitates persuading one this is the case” (cited in McLuhan, 1967). With Expo 67 however, theater “binged” on film (Shatnoff, p. 2).

**Misrecognizing the Revolution That Was**

Among world’s fairs Expo 67 is considered to be one of the best, if not, as many would argue, the greatest. In Canadian cultural memory, Expo 67 has attained a mythic status. Writing for The Toronto Star on the opening day of the fair, the acclaimed journalist and author Peter C. Newman effusively proclaimed that “the opening of Expo...may in retrospect turn out to have been one of those rare moments that changed the direction of a nation’s history […] This is the greatest thing we have ever done as a nation and surely the modernization of Canada – of its skylines, of its styles, its institutions – will be

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15. In order to be eligible for Academy Award nomination, multi-screen or tessellated films had to be converted to single-screen formats as in, for example, Chapman’s A Place to Stand.
dated from this occasion and from this fair” (April 28). As Prime Minister Lester Pearson likewise observed, “We are witness today to the fulfillment of one of the most daring acts of faith in Canadian enterprise and ability ever undertaken” (Time, May 5, 1967). A fiscal disaster but a socio-cultural triumph, the fair has four decades since been designated the “greatest show on earth,” our very own “land of Oz” (Atkinson), not only an outstanding accomplishment and pivotal moment for Montréal but “a jewel of a centennial gift and a fair the likes of which we will never see again” (ibid.).

With its global view of humanity and its humanist emphasis enshrined in its theme “Man and His World,” Expo 67 stood apart from earlier fairs, such as those of 1939 and 1964, with their heavy business and corporate presence. Dedicated to the expression of cultural innovation, what furthermore differentiated Expo 67 from the others was its claim to being the largest forum for novel and specialized modes of screen-based entertainments and experiences. Writing at the time, Theall and other cultural commentators believed these would launch a cinematic revolution. However, except for the development and proliferation of IMAX theatres, the revolution did not transpire. Nevertheless, as the entry in the Canadian Film Encyclopedia notes, new standards of creative and technical ingenuity were set and the groundwork for technological advances were laid (2003, Film Reference Library). To attribute any more than this is misleading and, moreover, an extravagant misrecognition of Expo 67’s true legacy.

In re-embedding the fair in the historical envelope of a complex of cultural, aesthetic and social circumstances that have thus far not been expressly articulated, the goal of this paper has been to trace the roster of influences and antecedents that coalesced at this moment so as to explain, not a revolution in multi-screen cinema, but the motivation behind the formal breakthroughs in viewing experiences that led to a radicalization of cinematic spectatorship itself. It was argued that, through the influence of, among others, Herbert Bayer, exhibition design had been reenvisioned through the introduction of a polyphonically structured medium of exhibition capable of simultaneously interweaving, in Paul Klee’s words, “several independent themes” within a space of distributed and dedifferentiated screens and displays. With the emphasis refracted away from the illusion on the screen to the surrounding space, it was maintained that the dominant experience of a single frontal screen, whether immersive or tessellated, was supplanted by a nonmatrixed theatrical performativity. Finally, in acknowledging the implicit influence of John Cage’s ideas of “anarchic dissociation” and “profound anarchy” and Minimalism’s rearticulation of sculpture as theatre, it was asserted that as a consequence of their practical realization at the fair, visitors to Expo 67 came to interact with the pavilions and their varied cinematic presentations as nonmatrixed performers in a poly-
attentive manner. The underlying argument of this paper has been that the multi-media and cinematic revolution that was claimed for Expo 67 has been to date constituted through misrecognition. By introducing the above reading of the fair, the status of the event itself shifts, a secret is revealed, and with it the repressed content is returned from the future.

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